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Security Council

Seventy-first year

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New York

President:	Mr. Seck	(Senegal)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gimolieca
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	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/962)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/962)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Ms. Elizabeth Hoff, World Health Organization representative in Syria.

Ms. Hoff is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Damascus.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/962, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: As we meet again this month, the suffering of civilians in Aleppo and across Syria rages on unabated. Horror is now usual; it is a level of violence and destruction that the world appears to consider normal for Syria and for the Syrian people. Month after month, I have reported to the Council that the level of depravity inflicted upon the Syrian people cannot sink lower, only to return the following month, in shocked disbelief, with hideous new reports of ever-worsening human suffering.

I am more or less at my wits' end as a human being, but I am here, like my colleagues, to be professional and objective. I had hoped to say today that last month I put it all on the table, and, frankly, it is still just as terrible. Let us leave it at that. Shame on us all for not acting to stop the annihilation of eastern Aleppo and its people and much of the rest of Syria, as well. Of all the facts and reports that I gave last month (see S/PV.7795), not one of them has been changed, qualified, denied or proven wrong by anyone in or outside of this Chamber. My statement then detailed the objective reality of what was taking place in Aleppo. It was hoped that the advocacy undertaken by me and others demand that sanity and humanity prevail and reporting based on clear and undisputable facts — although it is sometimes unpleasant to hear and even an inconvenient truth — might have an impact. There was a glimmer of hope. A unilateral Russian and Syrian pause on aerial bombardment over eastern Aleppo instituted on 18 October for an initial 72 hours was maintained beyond the stated end. We last met on 26 October (see S/PV.7795), when I welcomed the then ongoing pause in air strikes from the Russian Federation and the Government of Syria, although members will recall that my welcome was not heard that day in all quarters of the Council.

Daily and even weekly, the pause held over eastern Aleppo. The same was not the case for western Aleppo, as non-State armed groups launched hundreds of mortars into civilian areas in the western part of the city. Had all parties had the fortitude to cease all attacks over Aleppo, today's might have been a different briefing. But I cannot leave it at that because — one can hardly believe it — it is even worse now. Regrettably, over the past week we have seen an intense unleashing of military aggression in Aleppo and the surrounding rural area with truly devastating consequences for civilians. The pause over eastern Aleppo was shattered, thereby returning the city and its inhabitants to death and destruction once again. Reports of a high tempo of air strikes and shelling across areas of Aleppo city, held by non-State armed groups, reportedly by Syrian Government forces began again on 15 November. For the sake of accuracy and completeness, let me report here that the Russian Federation has repeatedly asserted that its air force and air strikes have resumed only in Idlib and Homs and not over eastern Aleppo.

Since last Tuesday, the bombing of eastern Aleppo has not stopped. Over the past days, reports have indicate that hundreds of civilians have been killed, injured or otherwise affected by the relentless attacks on eastern Aleppo. Entire families were reported to have been buried under rubble in the Al-Sukkari

district as first responders searched for survivors. Fires raged from incendiaries and household gas breaches in residential buildings following the attacks that stretched throughout eastern Aleppo. Deaths were reported in at least 10 neighbourhoods. As of yesterday, there are barely any functional hospitals left in eastern Aleppo able to treat those who have escaped death, as all the hospitals are being bombed into oblivion.

In parallel, more than 350 mortars and rockets have been reportedly launched by non-State armed groups indiscriminately into western Aleppo since 1 November, killing over 60 people, including women and children, and injuring more than 350 others. Over the weekend, an attack on a school in the Al-Furqan district in western Aleppo with mortar shells and rocket projectiles by non-State armed groups reportedly killed eight children and injured several others, while the local university was also hit. Overall, some 25,000 people have been displaced in western Aleppo in the last few weeks as a result of shelling by non-State armed groups. Let me be clear. We are not just seeing a resumption of violence in Aleppo. It is not business as usual. What has been unleashed on civilians this past week is yet another low in an unrelenting inhuman onslaught, and it is as heart-breaking as it is not inevitable. The parties to the conflict are — all of them — choosing to do this. It is civilians who pay the price.

Since July, 275,000 civilians have been trapped in eastern Aleppo owing to the siege tactics placed on them by the Syrian Government and its allies. Russia and Syria have opened corridors for civilians to leave, but they are reportedly unsafe or perceived as unsafe to traverse. There have also been reports that non-State armed groups inside eastern Aleppo prevented those wishing to leave the city from doing so. Humanitarian conditions in eastern Aleppo have gone from terrible to terrifying and now barely survivable by human beings. On 13 November, the last of the available food rations from the World Food Programme were distributed. Pre-positioned before United Nations access was cut off in July, rations were drawn out as long as possible, but now they are gone. Only a handful of rations from local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) remain, food in markets is scarce and prices have skyrocketed. Fuel and gas to cook food are reportedly unavailable in most neighbourhoods. That is resulting in negative coping strategies, reducing meals and restricting diets to feed children.

And along with limited food and medicine, there has been growing discontent with protests against corruption and a monopoly on goods reported last week, some of which turned violent, indicating the extreme desperation of the trapped citizens. And to add to the humanitarian crisis, they will shortly face a harsh winter without heating or the bare essentials for life. The United Nations has employed significant and tireless efforts to deliver life-saving aid. I yield to no one in saluting the undiluted, selfless bravery of all humanitarian aid workers across the United Nations, including the international NGOs, the local NGOs, first responders and people in their communities and families. They do that time and again, if they do not fall victim themselves at the time that they venture out, even risking a cynical second follow-on air strike, shell or sniper's bullet deliberately aimed at them, searching for life and saving lives. Let us repeat — they are not a target. And I urge the Government of Syria to give the Secretary General's internal board of inquiry into the attack on the humanitarian convoy, which resulted in the death of aid workers on 19 September at Oram Al-Kubra, full access in Syria to conduct its investigations.

Our teams in Damascus and Gaziantep have presented successive plans to all sides, working to ensure delivery of medical supplies and evacuation of the most urgent medical cases. We stand ready to move the moment that security guarantees by all parties are granted. The United Nations four-point plan presented last week to all parties includes critical medical evacuations and delivery of medical supplies. It includes the provision of food and other essential relief items. Finally, it includes the rotation of doctors to provide assistance to those in need. The 30 medical doctors left in eastern Aleppo city, exhausted from their heroic efforts and non-stop work from July continue to serve in unrelentingly traumatic circumstances.

All parties have the plan, and we have been engaging in unremitting discussions to obtain their agreement to proceed. But the restart of intense fighting is a clear setback to our goal of reaching agreement and delivering to those in need. Yet we are not deterred. Despite the bombing and whatever the difficulty, we are determined to follow through. The United Nations humanitarians and our partners will not give up on the people of Aleppo. We will continue to insist on the parties' obligations to respect international humanitarian law and human rights law and see to

sustained humanitarian assistance delivered to those in eastern Aleppo and all who are in need throughout Syria. I call on all with influence — that is the phrase I am diplomatically required to use, but those around this table and beyond knows who they are — to do their part to end the senseless cycles of violence once and for all and put an end to the slaughterhouse that is Aleppo. All sides, and those with influence over them, must immediately provide the necessary guarantees for the humanitarian four-point plan to move ahead.

While it defies comprehension, the citizens of eastern Aleppo are not alone in the depths of horrors being faced by civilians in Syria today. I remain seriously concerned about the fate of all those living in besieged locations. Aid deliveries and medical evacuations to the towns under the Four Towns ceasefire agreement covering Zabadani, Madaya, Fu'ah and Kafraya and surrounding areas, known as the Four Towns Agreement, have been unable to deploy owing to the tit-for-tat nature of the agreement.

The gruesome deaths by starvation in Madaya shocked the world in January and dragged the parties to the conflict to allow the delivery of aid. February, March and April this year all saw aid deliveries to the four towns. However, since then, the situation has deteriorated. Only one convoy has reached the four towns in over six months and that was on 25 September. In addition to no supplies getting in, those in need of medical attention are dying because they are not being allowed to leave. Since I last reported to the Council (see S/PV.7795), at least three people have died due to the denial by parties to the Four Towns Agreement to enable the evacuation of people who could have been saved but for that punitive application of the tit-for-tat approach. More will die soon in each of the four towns if that travesty is not resolved. I urge those with influence over the parties to the Agreement, notably Jaish Al-Fatah and Iran, must do all they can to see that aid is delivered immediately and that those requiring medical care are able to evacuate.

I have long called for the lifting of all sieges, which have become one of the most prevalent and insidious aspects of this merciless conflict. Yet, this past year, we have seen the opposite — a massive increase in the use of besiegement and of the overwhelming numbers of people, particularly by the Government of Syria. This time last year, the number of besieged people stood at 393,700. Six months ago, it stood at 486,700. Today, I have to report to the Council that, following a comprehensive review, we estimate that tonight a total of 974,080 people — nearly 1 million Syrians — are living under siege. New locations include Jubar in Damascus and Hajjar Al-Aswad, Khan Al-Shih and multiple areas in the enclave of eastern Ghouta in rural Damascus.

There is nothing subtle or complicated about the practice of besiegement. Civilians are being isolated, starved, bombed and denied medical attention and humanitarian assistance in order to force them to submit or flee. It is a deliberate tactic of cruelty to compound the people's suffering for political, military and, in some cases, economic gain to destroy and defeat a civilian population, who cannot fight back, and perpetrated monstrously by the one party, above all, who should be defending and protecting its own citizens — all of them, even those who do not like and disagree with the State and its leader and his Government. Those maintaining the sieges know by now that the Council is apparently unable or unwilling to enforce its will or agree now on steps to stop them. The procedures give us crumbs: an occasional convoy here and there around the time of Council briefings, to tick the box that we are all trying our best. But the near 1 million Syrians trapped in besieged locations cannot live on crumbs. The real question is — how can we prevent now nearly 1 million people from being subject to a cruel form of collective punishment that gets more severe and intense, month after month, across the country? If the Council cannot come together to bring an end to sieges, then it and we must all ask ourselves why we are having this meeting here this morning.

Attacks on civilian infrastructure, most notably hospitals and schools, have become so commonplace, it takes one's breath away. Such attacks are violations of international humanitarian law. Some have been called out as war crimes by the Secretary-General, including again yesterday and the High Commissioner for Human Rights has indicated that some may even amount to crimes against humanity. They are senseless, unconscionable acts with no purpose other than to punish civilians, including women, children and the infirm, and deny those left behind the means to survive or rebuild. Millions of Syrian children have had their childhoods ripped away by calculated and reckless attacks on schools. In the last two weeks of October alone, the lives and dreams of 30 children were stolen during attacks on five schools. On 26 October, the very day of my most recent briefing when denials were

screeching through the air, 22 children and six of their teachers were killed, when their school compound was repeatedly attacked in Hass, Idlib governorate. But the facts are that the children and their teachers are dead. Death, a dead body, warm to cold blood — however hard anyone may try, death is an undeniable fact and there is always a cause of death.

Let us imagine the terror of those children; imagine those who may have survived the first strike, some hysterical, some frozen in fear, only to see another round coming in. This year, UNICEF has documented 84 attacks on schools, killing at least 69 children and injuring many more. And what of those who survived such attacks — those children who dream of becoming doctors? To become a health-care worker in Syria is to take on a dangerous profession and to even go to a medical facility is to risk one's life. The Council adopted resolution 2286 (2016), protecting health-care professionals and facilities, but that has resulted in scant protection to those in Syria.

From 1 November to 18 November, 13 attacks were verified, and there are reports of many more attacks. Hospitals, health centres, blood banks and ambulances have all been hit. The fact is, since resolution 2286 (2016) was adopted on 3 May, over 130 attacks on medical facilities have been documented. The Syrian war has already killed more than 750 medical personnel. It is a disgusting and blatant disregard for the special protected status of health-care facilities under international humanitarian law and a clear spit in the face of the Council's resolution, as my World Health Organization colleague will expand on after my briefing. Despite the challenges and hardships, the United Nations and our partners continue regularly to reach nearly 6 million Syrians in need across the country per month. That assistance is delivered through regular programming and cross-line activities from Damascus, and cross-border assistance from Turkey and Jordan.

Let me touch briefly on cross-border activities, which have become a vital part of the response. Since cross-border operations began over two years ago, the United Nations has conducted 420 cross-border convoys, or nearly four a week on average, delivering health assistance sufficient for 9 million people, including vaccinations for 2 million people; food for 3 million people, many on a monthly basis; non-food items for almost 3 million people; and water, sanitation and hygiene supplies for over 2.5 million people. Assistance has been delivered to various parts of Aleppo, Idlib, Latakiya and Hama governorates from Turkey, and Dar'a and Al-Quneitra governorates from Jordan. Our efforts complement the critical role played by international and Syrian non-governmental organizations who provide assistance and services to millions more from neighbouring countries. We also continue to reach people via air. Since operations started several months ago, the World Food Programme has completed 153 airdrop rotations, dispatching 2,815 metric tons of food, nutrition, health and water, sanitation and hygiene supplies over Deir ez-Zor city. The United Nations has also completed 159 airlifts to Qamishli, delivering 5,660 metric tons of food, water, sanitation and hygiene supplies, nutrition, education, shelter and non-food-item assistance on behalf of humanitarian actors, including 61,500 full food rations.

At the berm along the Syrian-Jordanian border, which I visited in early September, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners have worked ceaselessly, together with the Jordanian authorities, to ensure the resumption of sustained aid operations to the many tens of thousands of women, men and children amassed at the border and in need of urgent lifesaving assistance. I am pleased to announce today that security and other arrangements have been finalized, and aid operations are set to commence tomorrow. I pay tribute to the cooperation I have personally had with the Jordanian State at the most senior levels to help enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the most challenging circumstances.

Unfortunately, I must report to the Council that, since the last reporting period, none — not one — of our inter-agency convoys was able to deliver aid across lines. Cross-line access requires detailed access negotiations with all sides to ensure security and allow aid to be delivered. Though our main interlocutor is, of course, the Syrian Government, we also work with the other parties to the conflict and the Member States that have influence over them — through the Humanitarian Task Force as well as bilaterally — but our efforts are increasingly met with delays, blockages and rejections. Every month we encounter new bureaucratic challenges that need to be navigated. We have dealt with late approvals, approvals with restrictions on the number of beneficiaries, delays in clearing trucks at the warehouse, negotiations over routes, medical supplies removed or not approved, and additional clearances beyond the agreed two-step process.

So far this month, we have three times navigated these hurdles, three times deployed convoys to reach those who are in need. Two of these convoys, both to Wadi Barada on 9 November and en route, in Rural Damascus, to Duma on 17 November, reached the final Government of Syria checkpoint before being forced to turn back when Syrian security forces, believed to be the Syrian Republican Guard, demanded the cleared containers be opened and searched. This is in clear breach of agreed protocol and a possible security threat for our convoys and aid workers. An earlier third convoy to Harbnafseh, in Rural Hama, scheduled for 1 November, was blocked by pro-Government armed elements while under way and also forced to turn back. Just yesterday, on 20 November, an inter-agency convoy to Rastan in northern rural Homs could not proceed owing to delays at the checkpoint in terms of approval to proceed, as well as shelling in the area once approval had finally been received.

As a result, as I said earlier, no inter-agency cross-line convoys have been able to deliver aid yet this month. We have now gone four months without delivering aid to anyone via an inter-agency cross-line convoy before 19 November. The result is that we are once again unlikely to reach more than a small portion of those whom we do receive formal approval to access.

Syrians have also been impacted by a series of anti-Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) operations. This has resulted in initial displacement of 8,000 people in the north of Raqqah governorate. We are foreseeing the need to support over 400,000 people as operations progress further. In Al-Bab, anti-ISIL operations are taking place just a kilometre outside the city, and planning for a more immediate response for the over 100,000 people estimated to be in the city and surrounding area is in its final stages. Let me be clear — when people need our support, we are working and will continue to work day and night to try to reach them no matter who or where they are. That is not being virtuous; that is our job, providing the Council gives us the funds to do it and we can get safe access.

I have had little positive to report on the implementation of the resolutions of the Council as regards the humanitarian situation in Syria. Air strikes and shelling kill and injure more and more civilians, and protected civilian infrastructure is destroyed with implications that will resonate for years to come. Besiegement is increasing, people are going hungry. Schools and hospitals are being bombed. The United Nations is increasingly blocked from delivering to those most in need.

Most frustratingly, this human suffering is all unnecessary. There is no amount of suffering that will result in an end to the conflict. There is no amount of military operations that will see an end to the conflict. The only solution, as has been said countless times before, is a political solution. There are people here at this table and beyond with the influence to tell the Syrian Government we are not prepared to take no for an answer. If you are a petrified civilian patient in Aleppo tonight, you do not need to hear your own Government pray national sovereignty in aid to justify using that sovereignty to bomb its own people and that patient.

I am mandated to report to the Security Council every month on the implementation of Council resolutions relating to the protection of civilians and the humanitarian situation in Syria. It is worth, for the record and at the risk of being accused again of preaching, reiterating what the Council demanded of all the parties nearly three years ago in resolution 2139 (2014), including, first, to immediately put an end to all forms of violence; second, to immediately cease all attacks against civilians, as well as the indiscriminate employment of weapons in populated areas; third, to immediately lift sieges in populated areas; fourth, to promptly allow rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners, including across conflict lines; fifth, to respect the principle of medical neutrality and facilitate free passage to all areas for medical personnel, equipment, transport and supplies, including surgical items; sixth, to protect civilians and desist from attacks directed against civilian objects; and seventh the immediate end of the practices of arbitrary detention and torture of civilians.

This is neither a long nor an exceptional list. More importantly, this is a list of neither unreasonable nor unattainable demands. These are the basic elements of how parties to a conflict must operate under international humanitarian law. They are based on the most basic concepts of universal decency and humanity as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations to which the Member States that are parties and proxies have signed up and international humanitarian law, which applies to all parties, States and non-State actors alike, except, it would seem, in Syria. In Syria — contrary to international humanitarian law and in blatant rejection and defiance of the resolutions of

the Council — death, deprivation, violence, starvation, siege tactics and attacks on civilian-populated areas and civilian infrastructure continue and they continue without penalty to the perpetrators.

I have called over and over for strong action from the Council to back up its resolutions and to take action when they are ignored day in day out. Without such backing, words and resolutions have proven to have little meaning for Syrians. Without strong backing from each Council member, red lines will be crossed again and again; international humanitarian law will be trampled on; war crimes will be committed. And until there is action by the Council, there will be no accountability.

It is high time to act. The United Nations humanitarians and our partners will continue to do our part. The United Nations will push at all angles to reach those in need. As is my job, I will report the facts, advocate and give voice to those suffering without respite and whose lives have been shattered time and again. I will do so until the Council decides to unite once again to do its collective part and resolve to bring this Syrian horror to an end.

I hear the argument that the Council should not pass a resolution because it would be "premature". It is never, never too premature to save a life. It is never too soon for the Council to find a solution to this conflict and end the suffering of the Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Hoff.

Ms. Hoff: I speak to the Council today from the country office of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Damascus, from where I have led WHO's work in Syria for more than four years.

As the conflict and violence continue unabated, I have seen the worst of humankind — but more importantly, I have seen its best. I wish to begin by paying tribute to WHO's staff in Syria for their selflessness and determination and to the health-care workers, health partners and national non-governmental organizations working on the front line, who put their own lives at risk every day when they reach out to Syrians in need. Observing their dedication and the sacrifices they make has been the greatest privilege of my life.

It is also a privilege to speak to the Council today to describe the health situation inside Syria and the challenges it presents.

Before the conflict began, Syria had one of the most advanced health-care systems in the Middle East. As the country reached middle-income status, non-communicable diseases were becoming the predominant health concern. National vaccination coverage rates were 95 per cent. Syria's thriving pharmaceutical industry produced over 90 per cent of the country's medicines and exported its products to 53 countries.

Now, almost six years later, the picture is starkly different. According to the United Nations, well over 300,000 people have been killed and over 1.5 million have been injured since the conflict began. Each month, the number of people injured in the conflict rises to 30,000. Almost 5 million people have left the country, and just over 6 million have been internally displaced. Within Syria, 13.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Almost 5 million people live in besieged or hard-to-reach locations. These numbers are staggering. Health-care services have been devastated. Over half the country's public hospitals and primary health-care centres are either closed or only partially functioning. Almost two-thirds of all health professionals have left the country. Domestic production of medicines has dropped by two thirds and vaccination coveragerates have dropped by half.

What does that mean for the Syrian people? It means that they no longer have sustainable and reliable access to medicines for chronic diseases that are manageable with treatment but life-threatening without. It means that unvaccinated children are at risk of life-threatening childhood illnesses such as polio, which re-emerged in Syria in late 2013 before being eradicated anew, thanks to the concerted efforts of WHO and UNICEF. It means that Syrians with traumatic injuries do not receive timely treatment and die or suffer life-changing disabilities. It means that pregnant women do not have access to safe delivery. It means that huge numbers will suffer lifelong mental health problems related to prolonged, traumatic stress and displacement.

There have been repeated attacks on health-care facilities in Syria. Between January and September, there were 126 such attacks — almost two thirds of all attacks reported in countries with emergencies. In November alone, 11 hospitals were attacked in Aleppo,

Idlib, and Hama governorates, and some were attacked more than once. The direct targeting of health-care facilities is the most visible attack on the health-care system in Syria today, but there are others as well, including the militarization of health care facilities by several parties to the conflict, the targeting of health-care personnel, and the denial of medical and surgical supplies in many areas. Many patients are simply too afraid to travel to hospitals or clinics because they fear attacks, detention or abuse.

Attacks on health-care facilities and workers have an enormous impact on the communities they serve. For example, before three hospitals in rural western Aleppo were attacked last week, they provided more than 10,000 consultations and performed 1,500 surgeries per month.

First of all, denying ordinary citizens access to health care is an affront to our common humanity. Everyone has the right to health; it is inscribed in many international agreements, including the United Nations Declaration.

Secondly, those attacks are an unacceptable violation of international humanitarian law. Even in war, there are rules against such attacks, inscribed in the Geneva Conventions relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts. Respect for the neutrality of health facilities is one of our most important humanitarian principles and laws.

Thirdly, those attacks also represent something deeper. We all have a sense that there is something very special — even sacred — about providing health care to children, mothers, and the disabled. When health-care facilities providing care to the most vulnerable are targeted, something very precious is lost. We have not only violated a right and a law, we have lost our collective humanity.

WHO condemns in the strongest terms attacks on health-care facilities by any party, regardless of their affiliation. We condemn the inappropriate use of health facilities for any military or political purpose. As the global health agency, we take seriously our responsibility to speak out against these abuses whenever we can. We do so regularly. Nonetheless, our repeated calls for protecting health-care facilities and personnel always fall on deaf ears.

I would like to highlight other challenges that WHO and its partners face on a daily basis, notably our difficulties accessing hard-to-reach and besieged locations to deliver life-saving medicines and supplies. The Government routinely withholds its approval for the delivery of medical supplies and equipment, particularly surgical supplies, safe blood and blood products, to those locations. Moreover, the operating environment is now so dangerous that many health partners, especially those managing cross-border operations, have limited their activities.

Aleppo is the most visible face of Syria's suffering. It illustrates our difficulty in accessing besieged and hard-to-reach locations. Over a quarter of a million people are trapped in eastern Aleppo. All eight of its hospitals have either been put out of action or are only barely functioning. Its few remaining doctors are exhausted and overwhelmed. Eastern Aleppo is running out of food, water, and medicine. WHO, along with humanitarian partners, has painstakingly prepared detailed plans to evacuate the critically ill and injured and allow convoys to deliver supplies to eastern Aleppo. The Organization is awaiting the removal of all obstacles that would allow it to implement its plans. Western Aleppo is also under attack by non-State armed groups in eastern Aleppo. Hospitals in western Aleppo have been overwhelmed with wounded patients, following indiscriminate shelling. Scores of children were killed or injured when a mortar landed on a school in western Aleppo last Saturday.

Thus far in 2016, WHO has provided over 9 million medical treatments throughout Syria, through both cross-line deliveries from Damascus and cross-border deliveries from Gaziantep and Amman. Over one third of those supplies were delivered to hard-to-reach and besieged areas. For the first time in several years, WHO, along with its United Nations partners and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, was able to reach all besieged areas as part of United Nations inter-agency convoys. However, WHO is not able to reach those areas on a regular basis due to the lack of approval of several parties to the conflict. The Government withheld approval for the delivery of 75 tons of medical supplies — mainly to support surgical, anaesthesiology, laboratory and mental health services — to those areas. As a result, around 150,000 people were deprived of essential health care.

WHO has established a nationwide disease surveillance system to detect and respond to outbreak alerts. Fortunately, no major disease outbreaks have occurred in Syria. The Organization has trained over

16,000 health-care workers to help fill the gap left by the mass exodus of health professionals. WHO and UNICEF have supported the vaccination of millions of children against polio, measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases. We have done all this with the sustained support of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and our national non-governmental organization partners. Lastly, WHO has used its position as the lead agency of the health sector to consistently advocate for the sanctity of health care and for sustained access to all parts of Syria to ensure that people are able to access the health care they need.

However, the situation is getting worse. WHO appeals to all members of the Security Council to use every last ounce of their influence to bring an immediate end to the suffering in Syria. We ask the Council to approve the establishment of a system to ensure that all parties have the coordinates of all humanitarian convoys and health facilities, and that all attacks are registered. We ask it to help end the attacks on health-care facilities and their personnel, regardless of the attackers' affiliation. We ask the Council to support sustained, unconditional access to all besieged and hard-to-reach areas. We ask the Council to help allow us to evacuate critically ill and wounded patients and their families from all areas and to ensure their safe passage.

I would like to reiterate that the WHO priority remains the people of Syria. As a humanitarian agency, we will continue our work to help to ensure that all people in all parts of the country have access to essential life-saving health care. We extend our deepest thanks to the donors that have so generously and steadfastly funded our operations in Syria during the past five years. We stand ready to give a more formal, in-depth briefing on those issues should the Council so desire.

Let me end by thanking you, Mr. President, and the members of the Security Council for their time and attention today.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Hoff for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): From month to month, Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien brings to our attention the daily horror in Syria, the daily horror that the civilian population faces — the children, the elderly, the sick. We thank Stephen for his briefing, a monthly briefing which is always painful to hear. I would also like to thank Ms. Hoff, the representative of the World Health Organization in Syria, for her equally heartfelt briefing.

We continue to bear witness of the worst armed conflict of the century and the greatest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War, without being able to react to such barbarity as the entire world so urgently requests of us. A few days ago, in the Council, when referring to other horrific attacks being carried out, that time in Yemen, we again raised a series of questions, which I will now paraphrase from that other scenario.

We again return to these questions to ask ourselves: In the name of what god can one bomb hospitals? In defence of what principles can one bomb schools? What cause can be defended by deliberately using snipers to kill doctors and humanitarian personnel? What overarching value is being protected by bombing convoys that are clearly identified as humanitarian convoys? What morality teaches us that all of them — the hospitals, the schools, the convoys, the humanitarian personnel — are terrorists, and therefore legitimate targets for barrel bombs and so-called bunker-busting, which are so destructive and that continue causing destruction in Syria, in Aleppo and across the entire country?

On a similar note, we were horrified by Stephen's comments with regard to non-State armed groups indiscriminately bombing schools and residential areas. I would like to express the hope that in the next briefing Stephen could change that terminology on non-State armed groups. A group that bombs schools and residential neighbourhoods is not a non-State armed group, but a terrorist group. And it should be identified as such, because barbarity does not bear a distinction worthy of excusing it. Whoever does so is equally a terrorist.

We can make the point that responsibility for the crisis must be shared by the entire Security Council, given our inability to find a path towards a solution. But certainly by far the majority of the responsibility is with the members of the Organization and of the Council that participate directly in the bombings and that contribute to those attacks by way of an unlimited supply of weapons.

How long can we honestly tolerate that? For how much longer must the violence continue in this way — echoing what Stephen had to say about the

horror. It is our belief that there must be an immediate cessation of hostilities in the entire Syrian territory, particularly in the currently most affected areas. We reiterate one more time the seven points mentioned by Stephen in his recent briefing. It is time to end the violence and the bloodshed and to offer some hope to the Syrian population.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank the Under-Secretary-General O'Brien and the World Health Organization Country Director Hoff for their comprehensive and deeply disturbing briefings. I thank them, as always, for presenting us with the unvarnished and unbiased facts. Their remarks show once again what happens when the conflict continues and when Russia and the Al-Assad regime relentlessly pummel civilian areas from the air and regularly block deliveries of humanitarian aid on the ground.

In opposition-held eastern Aleppo, at least 289 people are reported to have been killed since Tuesday. One Syrian volunteer reported 180 air strikes on eastern Aleppo on Saturday alone. Think of what you were doing on Saturday and imagine being subjected to 180 air strikes while doing it. A horrifying video from eastern Aleppo affirms a shocking inhuman barrage on civilian neighbourhoods.

Of course, we will hear today from the Syrian regime and the Russian Federation a very different narrative. Russia will no doubt talk at length about how its unilateral pause in air strikes over eastern Aleppo was some kind of humanitarian gesture. The reality is that the Al-Assad regime and Russia are continuing their starve-get-bombed-or-surrender strategy in eastern Aleppo: bombing the city's 275,000 residents and pausing to see if any will surrender to the Al-Assad regime — a regime that, as both we and the Syrian people know, has systematically tortured those who have found themselves under its custodial authority. Would any of us trust that regime with the lives of our family members, with our kids, with our parents, with our siblings?

Consider that when Russia paused its air strikes over eastern Aleppo they did so unilaterally, meaning that they never deigned to coordinate their efforts with the United Nations or any other organization actually providing aid. That was not a humanitarian gesture.

Consider that during this pause in strikes Russia and the Al-Assad regime never gave the United Nations permission to deliver a single parcel of food or medicine to eastern Aleppo — not one. That was not a humanitarian gesture.

Consider that Russian war regime planes dropped leaflets warning the people of eastern Aleppo to leave or be annihilated, as many of us discussed at our previous briefing (see S/PV.7795).

Consider that residents of eastern Aleppo reportedly received text messages warning people to flee before a "strategically planned assault" would happen.

Consider that last month (see S/PV.7785) Russia vetoed a draft resolution (S/2016/846) in the Security Council meant to end atrocities in Aleppo.

Those also were not humanitarian gestures.

Remember that eastern Aleppo is not an isolated case, it is part of a countrywide strategy across Syria. Russia and the Al-Assad regime are waging a campaign that includes sieges, the blocking of humanitarian aid, the indiscriminate bombardment of civilian areas and the use of barrel bombs.

Therefore, we members of the Council need to separate fact from fiction today. When we renewed the Joint Investigative Mechanism for Syria last week (see S/PV.7815), I and many members spoke of how we could not uphold the norm against chemical weapons use if we did not know which party was using chemical weapons. In that regard again, to uphold the humanitarian demands of the Council, we need to speak frankly and very specifically about which parties are responsible for the suffering of the Syrian people. That means condemning the atrocities committed by terrorist organizations like Jabhat Al-Nusra and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) — which the United States has done and will continue to do — but it also means telling the truth about Russia and the Al-Assad regime's actions. Today I will focus on just two features of regime and Russian terror.

First, the Al-Assad regime and Russia must stop the campaign of attacks that has destroyed countless schools, hospitals, homes and other civilian infrastructure. Take just some of the recent air strikes. Between 13 and 15 November, five hospitals in Syria were struck — five hospitals in two days. After air strikes hit another hospital in eastern Aleppo on 18 November, every hospital in that city is now reportedly out of service due to attacks by Russia and the Al-Assad regime: every single hospital, serving a population of 275,000 civilians, is out of commission.

On 6 November, an attack by the Al-Assad regime on a Damascus suburb reportedly killed at least six children in a kindergarten.

The United States recognizes that it is not just the Al-Assad regime and its allies that are causing civilians to suffer in Syria. We condemn, in the strongest terms, all indiscriminate shelling by opposition forces into the civilian areas of western Aleppo. Those attacks have reportedly caused more than 60 casualties since 1 November. We agree with Russia that there can be no justification for such attacks, but I ask: Will Russia condemn — here in the Chamber today, or any day — even a single air strike by the Al-Assad regime? Choose any of the hospitals that the Al-Assad regime has destroyed, or any of the schools. Will Russia ever condemn its ally, Bashar Al-Assad, here at the Council for a single one of those attacks? We have been attending meetings like this one for more than five years. Despite all of the carnage inflicted by the regime partners, they have uttered not one critical, nor even skeptical word.

Today I would like to specify some of the names of those involved since 2011 in killing and injuring civilians by conducting air and ground-based Syrian Government military assaults on cities, residential areas and civilian infrastructure. The United States will not let those who have commanded units involved in these actions hide anonymously behind the facade of the Al-Assad regime. We know who some of these commanders are. They include Major General Adeeb Salameh, Brigadier General Adnan Aboud Hilweh, Major General Jawdat Salbi Mawas, Colonel Suheil Al-Hassan and Major General Tahir Hamid Khalil.

Russia and the Al-Assad regime's merciless attacks must end and those behind such attacks must know that we and the international community are watching their actions and documenting their abuses, and that one day they will be held accountable. I know right now today, with the wind at their backs, these individuals feel impunity. However, so did Slobodan Milošević, Charles Taylor and countless war criminals before them. Today's atrocities are well-documented, and the civilized world's memories are long.

Secondly, the Al-Assad regime must end the suffering and torture in detention centres throughout Syria. The regime continues to imprison tens of thousands of Syrians, including women, children, doctors, humanitarian workers, human rights defenders and journalists, subjecting many to torture, sexual violence and inhumane conditions. Here is how a Syrian journalist named Shiar described his experience at military intelligence branch No. 235:

> "They had me stand on a barrel and they tied rope around my wrists. Then they took away the barrel. There was nothing below my feet. They were dangling in the air. They brought three sticks; they were hitting me everywhere. After they were done beating me with wooden sticks, they took the cigarettes. They were putting them out all over my body. It felt like a knife excavating my body, cutting me apart."

We know where torture has taken place and where it continues to take place: facilities that include military intelligence branches numbers 215, 227, 235 and 251; the air force intelligence investigation branch in Mezzeh military airport; the Sednaya Prison and the Tishreen and Hharasta military hospitals. The commanding officers and prison officials who work at those facilities should know, too, that the international community is watching and that they, too, will one day be held accountable. They include Major General Jamil Hassan, Brigadier General Abdul Salam Fajr Mahmoud, Brigadier General Ibrahim Ma'ala, Colonel Qusay Mihoub, Brigadier General Salah Hamad, Brigadier General Shafik Massa, Major General Rafiq Shehadeh and Hafez Makhlouf. The United States will not forget the cases of the many Syrians who have suffered so much at the hands of individuals like those, and we will continue fighting to hold them accountable for their hateful crimes.

I wish to stress that the United States recognizes that non-State groups have also committed many abuses against detainees, including torture. We condemn any group using such tactics in the strongest terms and we demand that immediate access be granted to monitor all detention facilities, whether regime, terrorist or opposition. ISIL atrocities are in a category unto themselves, which is why the United States leads a 67-member coalition to defeat that terrorist organization.

Let me conclude: in January, the United Nations and the world raised the alarm that the people in the community of Madaya, besieged by allies of the Al-Assad regime, were starving. Today we have reports of starvation again. Save The Children reported recently that Madaya is now also seeing an increse in child suicide attempts, something virtually unheard of in the town before.

One of those kids is a 15-year-old named Omar. Omar told a reporter recently,

> "There is nothing left for me here, and I felt the easiest thing to do was to kill myself. I tried to throw myself from the balcony, but it wasn't high enough."

Omar's father is in jail. His mom had to leave Madaya but left Omar behind, so he did not get recruited into the Government's security forces. Omar says,

> "There is nothing to eat. We are being strangled here. It is like I am in prison".

Omar has one other thought; one that you might expect from any teenager:

> "I miss my mum waking meup in the morning."

We — not just members of the Security Council, but all States Members of the United Nations — must be clear that the Al-Assad regime, Russia and their allies are responsible for that destruction, which is both physical destruction and, for countless children like Omar, psychological destruction. In the face of that destruction and overwhelming suffering, the perpetrators must know that the pursuit of a military solution is as foolish as it is brutal. Attacks on civilians fuel terrorism; they do not defeat terrorism. The perpetrators must also know that, like their ignominious predecessors throughout history, they will face judgment for their crimes.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I would like to express my gratitude to Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for his comprehensive briefing. I also thank Ms. Elizabeth Hoff, World Health Organization (WHO) Representative in Syria, for accepting Japan's proposal to make a briefing to the Security Council at such short notice, and through her I thank the dedicated personnel of the WHO, who have been working hard in such a difficult environment.

The humanitarian situation in Syria is devastating. Over the course of the weekend, we continued to hear news of the terrible attacks and casualties in Aleppo and elsewhere. Frustration is building over the inability to address the humanitarian crisis, but we must not abandon our efforts. We appreciate that some members of the Security Council have taken the initiative to advance discussions on the humanitarian situation. We are also aware of efforts by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) co-Chairs and regional stakeholders after the Lausanne meeting in October. However, what we need now are actual improvements on the ground. We need an agreement either from the Security Council or the ISSG that will truly change the situation in Syria.

Mr. O'Brien's briefing presented us with a picture of the desperate situation in Syria. Even during the pause in aerial attacks by the Syrian Government and Russia, the United Nations could not deliver any assistance to the people of eastern Aleppo. As Mr. O'Brien explained, even single attempts at humanitarian access face countless obstacles on the ground. Today is not the first time that we have heard that discouraging story. However, the situation is now so severe that not a single convoy has achieved access to Aleppo.

I have one simple question: If those States that have influence, especially ISSG members, exert the utmost influence on the parties on the ground, might we be able to overcome some of the impediments to humanitarian access? If not, what can be done to ensure that the necessary actions are achieved on the ground? That is a question that needs to be answered.

I am sure I speak for all of my colleagues when I say that the Security Council was grateful to receive such an extensive briefing from Ms. Hoff, who is following the situation in Damascus closely. We highly commend WHO efforts in delivering lifesaving treatments to the Syrian people and strengthening health services, including measures to counter children's diseases. Today's briefing described a truly devastating situation and made it absolutely clear that Syria's medical sector is in huge and imminent need of major rehabilitation.

We are shocked by the sheer number of medical facilities that have been attacked in 2016. Japan reiterates its position that the parties to the armed conflict have the obligation to respect international humanitarian law in all circumstances, and violators of international humanitarian law must be held accountable. The Permanent representative of the United States has just mentioned specific names. If the lack of clarity on the attackers is making it difficult to take measures to effectively protect medical facilities, the Security Council should request a Secretariat investigation and other necessary measures.

This monthly meeting on the humanitarian situation in Syria must not simply be a venue for us to express our deep concern about civilians and medical personnel who are facing devastating situations. We need to take

action and achieve concrete results. There is no time to spare. I look forward to a constructive discussion in the informal consultations that are to follow.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Stephen O'Brien and Ms. Elizabeth Hoff for their briefings, which once again give cause for indignation. I would like to pay tribute to the work that they and their teams are carrying out. Their briefings depict a relentless spiral of violence that makes it impossible for humanitarian actors to carry out their work and condemns hundreds of thousands of people to hunger and death. I would like to underscore three points today.

First, simple words cannot describe the seriousness of the humanitarian situation in Aleppo today. Eastern Aleppo is the double victim of a barrage of fire and a siege that is fitting of the Middle Ages. Both target civilians and constitute war crimes. According to the information available to us, hundreds of people, including many children, have been killed since last Tuesday as a result of bombings and uninterrupted shelling, which means that rescue teams are unable to intervene to rescue the wounded from the rubble. Those conditions make it impossible for humanitarian workers to carry out their work by delivering humanitarian aid and carrying out medical evacuations. No convoy has been able to reach eastern Aleppo since July. The humanitarian aid reserves in warehouses in western Aleppo have now been exhausted. Today, more than 275,000 civilians in eastern Aleppo are besieged as a result of the incessant bombing of the regime and its supporters. They have no food, medical equipment or access to essential services. The Special Envoy unequivocally stated that the fall of eastern Aleppo will trigger an unprecedented humanitarian crisis and could force more than 200,000 people to flee to Turkey.

Secondly, the people of Aleppo are not the only population suffering in Syria. The regime is besieging civilians across the country and is refusing to abide by the necessary monthly humanitarian aid convoy authorizations, as part of a deliberate obstructive policy to force the population to flee and its opponents to submit. In November, the United Nations submitted 38 requests to access 900,000 people in 25 besieged or hard-to-reach areas. One third of those requests were rejected without any valid justification citing humanitarian aid principles. In Duma, as Mr. O'Brien pointed out to us, a major convoy that was to deliver humanitarian aid to 70,000 people has been held up at the last check point maintained by the regime. Syrian authorities have demanded convoys to unload their cargo, despite the fact that they are affixed with the necessary clearance. Medical and health supplies are still deliberately removed from convoys, and 45,000 medical supplies were removed and destroyed in October. Aid continues to be hindered and destroyed and the population continues to go hungry and untreated; and all the while the regime continues to impose its demands on the United Nations and its partners. I recall that the Syrian authorities are expressly bound to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law, an obligation that includes ensuring swift, safe and unhindered access to the entire population in Syria, in line with Security Council resolutions.

Thirdly, the regime and its allies continue their illegal deliberate attacks on hospitals and medical staff, actions that constitute war crimes. Five hospitals were attacked between 3 to 15 November, leading to at least two deaths and 19 injuries, including six medical staff. As the Secretary-General pointed out yesterday, there is no longer a single hospital functioning in eastern Aleppo today. The WHO has reported 126 attacks of that nature in Syria since the beginning of the year. Daily action of that kind in Syria cannot go unpunished, and full light must be shed on all violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that undermine the claims of the regime that it is seeking to provide for the Syrian people and the future of country.

Over the past two months, France has unceasingly sought to hammer home a message that I repeat again today. The regime and its supporters must immediately and definitively cease their bombings of Aleppo and allow humanitarian actors to swiftly deliver emergency aid to the entire population that stands in need today. That call is shared by a very large majority of members of this Council.

France calls once again on those members of the Council that are involved in the combat and have influence on the regime to break the ongoing downward course in that devasted land, which will only usher in decades instability, violence and terrorism. Let us not deceive ourselves. It is not just a total war-strategy that has been triggered in Aleppo. It is not only a humanitarian catastrophe, but also a strategic error. That strategy will mechanically lead to the partition of Syria. It will exacerbate the pace towards radicalization and it will strengthen Da'esh and terrorism in general. In Aleppo, horror and terror are two sides of the same coin.

On behalf of France, I would like to underscore once more the absolute urgency of immediately ending the bombardments and the war, to seek together a political solution. That is the only possible way out of the tragedy, and it is the responsibility of the Security Council, whose credibility is heavily involved.

Mr. Ryecroft (United Kingdom): I thank Stephen O'Brien and Elizabeth Hoff for their powerful briefings.

The United Nations is working tirelessly to help millions of men, women and children in desperate need in Syria. The Syrian regime and Russia, in contrast, seem to be determined to increase that number, make their suffering even worse and prolong the barbaric conflict. As Stephen has spelled out, that is most clearly seen in Aleppo. Hundreds of thousands of people are enduring hell, living without the most basic supplies, living — if it can be called that — in fear of barrel bombs, shelling or worse. They have gone months without receiving a single delivery of aid or a single box of medical supplies. And yet, thanks to the United Nations there are trucks full of supplies ready and waiting to go, ready and waiting to save lives.

The Syrian regime, which Russia chooses to back, is deliberately preventing the food and medicine from reaching those in need. Russia has the power to allow the aid, so desperately needed, into the city. If it does not, the world will hold it to account for the barbarous result. I urge the Russian Federation to persuade the Syrian regime to let the United Nations do its job and get aid into Aleppo.

But the tragedy is that even that will not be enough. Not content with starving thousands of innocent civilians, the Assad regime is pummelling them with sortie after sortie of devastating air strikes. As we have heard, dozens have been killed and injured in the past few days alone, including through two vile attacks on the same children's hospital. Elizabeth has confirmed that there are no more functioning hospitals left in eastern Aleppo. That is the result of deliberate aerial attacks on those hospitals and is part of a systematic campaign to remove even the most basic of services left in the city. And yet, Russia has said: "The allegedly bombed hospitals in Aleppo exist only in the imagination". Please. We all know what needs to happen. I will repeat it in the Chamber again, and I will keep doing so until I am blue in the face if it means shifting the policy of the Russian Federation.

First, stop the war crimes. Attacks on hospitals, civilians, schools and vital infrastructure are attacks that serve no military purpose. How can the bombing of the school, like the one in Idlib, be justified? How can the killing of 20 children and 3 teachers be justified? As Elbio Rosselli said, there is no god and no principle that can possibly justify such an attack. We all want to counter terrorism in Syria, but attacks on schools and hospitals are not counter-terrorist operations. So we support Staffan de Mistura's request to send a United Nations verification team to investigate the attacks on hospitals in Aleppo.

Secondly, aid needs to get in. We commend the United Nations on its humanitarian response plan for Aleppo. All parties need to implement it fully and immediately. But the issue goes far beyond Aleppo. As Staffan said, the United Nations now puts the number of those living in besieged areas at almost one million people. Aid must reach those people. Unless we see an improvement, November will be the worst month yet for effots to deliver aid to besieged and hard-to-reach areas across Syria. Not one single humantarian convoy has reached any of those areas on the United Nations plan this month.

Those are two simple steps, and they must be taken if we are to have a chance of that most elusive third step — political talks that will bring an end to this horrorific conflict. As I have said many times before, Russia has a unique role to play in all three of those steps: to persuade the regime to end its destructive military approach, to allow full humanitarian access to all beiseged areas and to commit to a political settlement to end the brutal war.

Mr. Gimolieca (Angola): We thank Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs O'Brien and Ms. Hoff for their briefings.

Unfortunately, we have to accommodate the inability of the Security Council and the international community to make progress regarding Syria. The ongoing situation in the city of Aleppo is most distressing. Last month we witnessed a dramatic deterioration of the humanitarian situation in that historic city, leaving the vast majority of the population without access to basic necessities and life-saving assistance. The horrific fighting has caused innumerous deaths and injuries among the civilian population. The destruction of essential infrastructure, such as hospitals, clinics and ambulances, and the lack of medical staff have exponentially increased the

number of casualties, wounded and displaced persons, absolutely overwhelming the ability of the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies to carry out their duties.

Meanwhile, the Security Council remains unable to reach any semblance of unity to express a common position on the issue, while witnessing, on a daily basis, the current violations of the most basic tenets of international human rights and humanitarian law. The latest escalation of fighting in Eastern Aleppo is most regrettable. It is urgent that we consider ways to set aside political differences and reset our focus on a new round of political talks. While we understand the geopolitical implications for the major stakeholders in the region and beyond, we cannot accept the continuous suffering of innocent civilians. We therefore support the draft resolution submitted by Egypt, New Zealand and Spain calling on all the parties to cease fighting for at least 10 days in order to allow and facilitate immediate, safe, sustained and unhindered humanitarian access to all of Aleppo by the United Nations and its implementing partners. In our view, that would constitute an important first step towards a resumption of negotiations, which in the long term represents the most appropriate solution to the conflict.

We would like to once again call on the members of the Security Council to set aside their political differences and rivalries and act in the interests of international peace and security. The Middle East has been affected by conflict and humanitarian crises for too long, and the repercussions of our inability to help solve the problems there are being felt all over the world. The real influence of certain regional Powers, as well as that which some members of the Council are able to exert on the parties concerned, should be used to advance a political solution to the conflict instead of supplying weapons and lethal equipment to the sides in the conflict in the search for an impossible military outcome.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): We appreciate both of today's briefings, which only add to the extremely gloomy picture we have all been seeing for many months now. The situation in Syria is a cause of continuing concern. After six years of conflict there, we are still not seeing any viable progress towards a political solution. The forces of the regime and its allies continue to pursue their goal of changing the military balance and creating new realities on the ground. If the recent history of the conflict is any guide, the fragile logic is doomed to failure.

In the past three months we have seen four offensives and counter-offensives, with the sides in the conflict taking, losing and retaking the ground. There is no winner in this game, but the losers are obvious — they are the civilians, who continue to suffer from the warmongering of hawks. We agree with condemnation by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 16 November stating that between 13 and 16 November six hospitals in Syria were attacked in aerial bombardments. Those numbers will increase, given the additional firepower of the reinforcements employed by the Russian Federation and the active participation of the *Admiral Kuznetsov* naval battle group in the bombing of Aleppo, Idlib and Homs.

It may sound like a joke, but yesterday the Twitter feed of the Russian Embassy in the United Arab Emirates stated that "The allegedly destroyed hospitals in #Aleppo exist only in the mind of the Department of State's spokesman John Kirby." We are also deeply concerned about recent information from WHO that all the hospitals in the besieged rebel-held areas of eastern Aleppo are now incapacitated after days of heavy air strikes.

President Al-Assad has recently been very vocal in the media. In an interview on 16 November with Rádio e Televisão de Portugal, he made it very clear that he continues to view all the forces in Aleppo and other embattled provinces as terrorists. Unfortunately, we are seeing some attempts to reconsider the role of the Syrian President in the future of the country. The changing of the great Powers' policies towards a political transition in Syria could provoke yet more instability throughout the Middle East.

We underscore the urgent need for accountability in Syria. We welcome the fact that the United Nations Board of Inquiry has begun its investigation of the attack on 19 September on the United Nations-Syrian Arab Red Crescent relief operation to Urum al-Kubra, and we look forward to its conclusions. We also call for an immediate inquiry into the killing on 26 October of children and other civilians in a school complex in the village of Haas in Idlib province. The perpetrators of such horrific crimes appear to act in the confidence that there will be no accountability and justice. They must be proved wrong.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): To begin with, I would like to say that we greatly appreciate the work of the United Nations humanitarian personnel in Syria, and we actively support them. There is no need to convince us of the importance of assisting the United Nations, and Ambassador Rycroft's suggestion to that effect is dishonest. What is he talking about?

First of all, we should look at what is really going on in a professional manner. Thanks to the continued efforts of Russian experts, the number of residential areas in Syria covered by the truce has risen to 961. Seventy armed opposition groups have officially joined the ceasefire regime. Talks with armed-group commanders are going on in a number of provinces. Russia continues to provide the people of the Syrian Arab Republic with substantive humanitarian assistance.

We continue our persistent quest to find ways to improve the situation in Aleppo. As we all know, the eastern districts of that strategically important city are held by armed groups led by the terrorist organization Jabhat Al-Nusra. The long-promised separation of the moderate opposition from adherents of Al-Nusra has yet to happen. We continue to be showered with data showing shrinking numbers for Al-Nusra, based on information from the press and even from opposition social networks. What kind of sources are those? That helps to maintain an intolerable situation in which thousands of peaceful residents are held hostage. What does that represent? The desire to preserve a major centre of terrorist-led anti-Government resistance at any cost? There are extremely disturbing reports of the brutal suppression of demonstrations by peaceful residents demanding that the radicals leave the city. Our professional bilateral contacts with the American side are currently continuing, and we hope they will enable us to come up with an appropriate solution.

At a Security Council meeting in October (see S/PV.7785) we had a detailed discussion of the reasons for the disruption of the humanitarian operation, owing to sabotage by illegal armed groups and the so-called local council against a backdrop of — and this is putting it mildly — inadequate action on the part of certain United Nations staff, of which they are well aware and, as I understand it, which they now regret. We cannot permit any repeat of that kind of scenario. From now on, let us see the insurgents, including those of Ahrar al-Sham and Nour al-Din al-Zenki, publicly affirm — and their sponsors guarantee — their willingness to cooperate with the United Nations agencies and enable humanitarian operations to be conducted without obstacles or artificial constraints. There can be no bartering of the sick and injured for food and medicines for the insurgents.

We also expect to see similar efforts on the part of the local council in eastern Aleppo. We have a right to hope in particular that our English colleagues, or the French — who have received these people in Paris at the highest level — will help in that department. That is what they should be talking about — about their own efforts, not about what they want from Russia, what Russia should do, what Russia can do. They should be talking about their own efforts. We are States, after all. What can be asked of Russia? What should Russia do? After all, we have found out that there are two such councils, existing through infusions from abroad. One of them is functioning in Gazientep. The other is in Syria, outside of Aleppo. Neither one of them is responsible for law and order. It is hardly possible to consider the councils representative bodies of local Governments in eastern Aleppo. They are not even in Aleppo. Formally speaking, their mandates have ended. Let us not forget that.

We have also noticed that every month we find out through United Nations reports about an increasing number of people in besieged areas. Invariably that is due to the population centres that are under the control of armed groups. If the purpose of such mathematical distortions is to present the Syrian Government as the main party responsible for suffering, then it is an unacceptable approach. It is not clear how such calculations are carried out, because United Nations evaluation missions are not allowed access to besieged territories. Nonetheless, those missions regularly provide statistics based on nothing.

At the same time, the number of people who are in need of humanitarian assistance in territories under the control of the Government is constantly underestimated. For example, an interesting instance of such underrepresentation is from the bulletin for 20 April, which stated the number of people in Deir ez-Zor — which is besieged by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant — to be 200,000. On 3 May, the number was 110,000. We follow what is happening there very closely because, unlike what has been hypocritically described by some as an operation of support, we are conducting a counter-terrorism operation in the country. Yes, we are supporting the legitimate Government.

The most recent information about attacks against civilian infrastructure is pure propaganda. It is not objectively verified. According to that information, the only thing that Syrians do is bomb health facilities and increase the intensiveness of such attacks right before Security Council meetings. If we amassed all the Internet data on attacks against health facilities, we might be surprised by the number of those facilities — which pre-war Syria never had. At the same time, it is continuously stated that there are no functioning health facilities remaining. That always happens immediately prior to a Security Council meeting.

As a result of the shelling by the fighters in eastern Aleppo, the United Nations has left western Aleppo. Why is that something that we are not talking about today? Why is it that the attacks against the Embassies in Damascus are not being condemned? In the absence of the United Nations in Aleppo, information is gathered from God knows where — from various countries and from non-governmental organizations that are outside of Syria. Data is being intentionally falsified. Let me point out that information is never provided about the location of so-called mobile hospitals in areas under the control of rebel fighters who are supported by Western partners. When we asked for an honest exchange of information, that was what we specifically had in mind.

My colleague from the United States, Ms. Power, is absolutely right. Let me say again that as of 18 October the Russian Air Force has not conducted airstrikes on Aleppo or within the 10 kilometres surrounding it. We are waiting for the moderate opposition to dissociate themselves from the terrorist groups. That is an urgent task.

I must say that because of the efforts of our partners — today's statements are testimony to that — the work of the Council on the Syrian settlement is increasingly moving into the virtual sphere, which has nothing in common with the realities of the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. Let me recall, for example, the many appeals to the Governments of Syria and Russia. But who is going to work with those who were brought into Syria and provided with weapons and money? Can we imagine what it must be like for a secular Syria, which has a long tradition of coexistence of various faiths and cultures, to witness the presence of foreign fighters? Let us assess that professionally. What kind of significance does that have for them? Who is going to be working with those people? It seems that no one will. First, the conflict was brought into existence. Now there is fear of the conflict and actions are being dictated by that fear. That is what is happening.

Some want to put the whole world into a tribunal. Those parties have reached the point where they have listed the names of Syrian officers and generals. However, if they claim to be impartial, where are the names of the terrorists? Who is going to deal with them? Maybe those parties have become frightened of them. Let us try to not be hypocritical. Those parties have forgotten about their own golden standard on the presumption of innocence by pre-emptively identifying those responsible, which is something that ought to only be decided by a legal process. That is elementary, and yet I find myself saying it in the Security Council.

Let me also say that I have listened very carefully to my colleagues with whom I work on a daily basis on various issues. Their harshness tells me that their plans are not working, that something went wrong and that they are incapable of removing yet another regime and destroying another country in the Middle East. They cannot do that. However, it is never too late to stop trying. The doors of cooperation remain open.

Mr. Suárez Moreno (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Mr. O'Brien and Ms. Hoff for their briefings.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela expresses its concern about the humanitarian situation in Syria. We pay tribute to the efforts of humanitarian agencies that carry out extraordinary and noble work to assist millions of Syrians in spite of high levels of risk in such a raging conflict. We are pleased to hear that humanitarian agencies were able to send 28 lorries to the Duma area yesterday. We also welcome the news that the funds to continue humanitarian aid for approximately 2.8 million people have been procured.

Humanitarian aid must be balanced, effective and impartial. Therefore we believe that, although the humanitarian situation in Aleppo requires the international community to provide an immediate response, we also must bear in mind that assistance to other parts of the country has continued, despite the difficulties posed by the armed conflict.

Terrorism is the cause of the humanitarian catastrophe in Syria. The acts caried out by groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), the Al-Nusra Front and their allies are a threat to international peace and security, which is why they

must be combated in strict adherence to international law. In the case of Aleppo, the humanitarian pauses offered by the authorities as of 18 October were blocked by militants of Al-Nusra Front and partner groups. Those groups prevented civilians from evacuating the affected areas. Recently we have observed that in eastern Aleppo people are rising up against the terrorist groups, which not only use them as human shields but also deny them the little food there is.

In the light of what is happening, why has the so-called moderate opposition not clearly and tangibly decoupled itself from those terrorist groups? It seems they are not so moderate as they present themselves to the international community. It is evident that complicity between the terrorist groups in eastern Aleppo and the so-called moderate opposition is a serious obstacle to peace in Syria. There is an ongoing threat of ISIS in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor. Both regions present a real threat tothe delivery of humanitarian aid. Denying the civilian population access to humanitarian aid has become part of the daily practice of ISIS and the Al-Nusra Front. Those terrorist groups and their partners have become looming threats to peace and stability in the region. We must counter their influence with all available and necessary measures, while strictly adhering to international law

We would like to raise a similar concern about the destruction of basic infrastructure and services, such as hospitals, water distribution services and electricity substations. As Ms. Elizabeth Hoff of the World Health Organization pointed out a few minutes ago, before the war broke out Syria had one of the most advanced health-care systems in the Middle East. However, owing to the war, which has raged for six years now and which has been financed from abroad, the health-care system lies, unfortunately, in ruins. We therefore call upon the parties and those who have influence on the parties to resume political negotiations as swiftly as possible without attaching preconditions to the aforementioned resumed negotiations so that we can work towards a solution to the conflict, which has caused so much suffering to the people of Syria. The prolongation of the conflict will only cause more suffering and more destruction for the Syrian population.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): I thank Mr. Stephen O'Brien and Ms.Elizabeth Hoff for their briefings. I commend them and their staff for their courage and determination in persevering in such difficult and dispiriting conditions.

Mr. O'Brien asked the question as to why the Council is holding this meeting. We could have asked the same question during each of the past 12 months. The Council has been powerless in dealing with the essential problem in Syria. Important work has been done in addressing the particular menace of chemical weapons, and, as Mr. O'Brien has reminded us, important humanitarian assistance has been able to get through under the cross-border arrangements called for by the Council. But, as we have heard today, cross-front-line access, also called for by the Council, has been systematically denied, blocked, obstructed and obfuscated by the Syrian Government or forces allied with it. And our resolution 2286 (2016) on attacks on health-care workers or hospitals has been blatantly ignored, as we have been told today.

Most fundamentally, the Council has been powerless in dealing with the most serious threat facing the Syrian people, namely, the besiegement and bombardment of civilians, most notably in Aleppo, and, as we have been reminded again today, throughout other parts of Syria, as well. I am not going to revisit the horrors that flow from our inaction. They have been described more than adequately by Mr. O'Brien, Ms. Hoff and others. Looking around the Chamber today, I felt I can see in the faces of my colleagues some of the shame that I feel myself. Instead of responding to the clear breaches of international peace and security, the Council has been largely just a witness to the horrors that have been described to us again today.

The situation in Syria is horrible and complex, and many players, external and internal, are playing roles there. A particularly unhelpful role is being played by the terrorist groups. However, leaving aside the area occupied and controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, no amount of diplomatic diversion can hide the fact that we are witness to the destruction of a country and its people, led by its own Government and supported by a permanent member of the Security Council.

As is well-known, after last month's vetos (see S/PV.7785), New Zealand tried to advance a draft resolution that would have demanded an end to all attacks that risked death or injury to civilians in Syria, especially in Aleppo. It was deeply frustrating that the Council could not unite around a proposition as simple and basic as that. Nonetheless, New Zealand, together with Egypt and Spain, is again putting forward a draft resolution that is similarly modest in ambition.

Indeed, we consider it to be the bare minimum that the Council can do. It approaches the conflict through a humanitarian lens, establishes a 10-day pause in Aleppo to allow the United Nations and its partners to get aid in and sick people out, and re-establishes the cessation of hostilities in the remainder of the country. It also begins to deal with some very difficult issues, namely, separation and the political process, but it does not try to provide all the answers. We are aware that there are conversations going on elsewhere. The draft resolution is intended to be complementary to those conversations. We are committed to taking this draft resolution forward, and we urge all Council members to support us in words and in action.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): We thank Mr. Stephen O'Brien and Ms. Elizabeth Hoff for their briefings. All too often, the briefings continue to depict a brutal and terrifying reality arising from our inability to end the sufferings of Syrians in eastern Aleppo. It pains us to listen to Mr. O'Brien's horrifying account of the miserable plight of the innocent. Just five days ago, a resumption of the intense blitz on the besieged city pulverized the brief lull in the aerial bombardment and the relative calm in Aleppo, and scores of innocent persons were killed yet again.

We are told that there can be no compromise in the fight against terrorism. The deliberate bombings of hospitals make it seem, however, that nothing was meant to be spared. The fact that all the hospitals in Aleppo are in ruins is utterly abhorrent. We are appalled that civilians, especially women and children, had to be treated in field hospitals set up in homes near the front lines just to avoid being targeted. The temporary and makeshift hospitals can never be adequate, and the desparate situation is only made worse by the acute shortages and lack of medical supplies and equipment, as well as by the lack of a medical-evacuation exercise since the middle of this year.

The resumptions of air strikes and the bombardment of Aleppo last week meant that any hope for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilians has diminished. We are concerned by what was reported by Mr. O'Brien earlier that the last remaining food rations are now being handed out, and that there will be nothing left to distribute next week without a resupply. We fear that without a resupply, his next report will contain accounts of mass deaths owing to starvation, something that we could have helped to avoid. It is regrettable that no humanitarian access has been granted to the United Nations in the past four weeks despite the relative calm in Aleppo. As winter approaches, we call on all conflicting parties to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid through a coordinated approach with the United Nations. It is an exercise that the United Nations has repeatedly pronounced its readiness to undertake immediately.

Hostilities in Aleppo aside, my delegation is also concerned at the military escalations in Idlib and Homs. While Malaysia shares the notion of eliminating terrorism and its threat, such a fight must not be at the expense of innocent civilians. The senseless collective punishment must be stopped. Several schools have reportedly been targeted by air strikes in Idlib, more just yesterday. The targeting of schools only serves to indicate that the war is about inflicting maximum sufferings on the vulnerable. Children, some of whom were leaving their school compounds, were killed. Those incidents must be investigated, with the perpetrators being held to account.

Before I conclude, we join other Council members in calling for actions on the United Nations plan for eastern Aleppo and Syria as a whole. We have an obligation to reverse the depressing developments for the sake of innocent Syrians. We have before us a proposal by the humanitarian penholders for a Council response to the situation in Syria, and we must make this fourth attempt count for something. We urge those who could make the difference to listen to the voice of their conscience and to halt the atrocities.

We pay our tributes to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and all humanitarian actors on the ground for their tireless and brave efforts in alleviating the sufferings of the men, women and children of Syria. Our thoughts and condolences also go to the family of Mr. Husein Muhsen, a humanitarian staff member of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees inthe Near East, who was killed in an air strike while assisting Palestinian refugees in Khan Eshieh refugee camp just a week ago. The tenacity of our comrades in Syria must at the very least be rewarded with a signal that the Council cares. It has a duty to uphold, and it needs to respond to the deteriorating situation in Syria. It must stop the senseless killing and destruction.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): My thanks go, above all, to Stephen and to Elizabeth for their respective briefings and for their excellent

work. I should like also to thank the Ambassador of New Zealand, who described very clearly the joint efforts that Egypt, New Zealand and Spain are making to ensure the adoption of a series of measures aimed at halting the fighting in Aleppo so that humanitarian aid can be distributed inside the city.

Indeed, given the humanitarian disaster depicted by Stephen O'Brien, no simple message in and of itself can be enough. We have heard today about deliberate attacks on doctors and hospitals such as the ones reported by Médecins Sans Frontières this weekend, which destroyed the last paediatric clinic in eastern Aleppo. Violations of international humanitarian law occur daily.

My delegation is not resigned to this situation. We must do more than just condemn, though it certainly seems difficult. We support the efforts of the Special Envoy, who was in Damascus over the weekend seeking a solution to the most pressing problems facing Syria. We trust that the Geneva talks will bear fruit. However, the Security Council must shoulder its responsibility to halt the country's slide into violence and bring about a new cessation of hostilities. It is also the Council's responsibility, as has been said repeatedly, to make a distinction between terrorists and the opposition.

We are at a turning point in the war in Syria. We can try to protect the population of Aleppo and restore the cessation of hostilities across the country, or we can let the conflict descend into a spiral of violence with the attendant unpredictable consequences. Spain firmly supports the first option. As I noted at the outset, we will continue to work with Egypt and with New Zealand, in a few minutes' time in the Consultations Room, and with our other partners in the Security Council to try to achieve that outcome.

Mr. Shen Bo (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I should like at the outset to thank Under-Secretary-General O'Brien and Ms. Hoff, the representative of the World Health Organization, for their briefings.

The humanitarian situation in some areas of Syria, including in Aleppo, is very serious, leading to massive civilian casualties and including attacks on civilian and health-care facilities. China condemns any attack against civilians or humanitarian infrastructure. We truly empathize with the Syrian people's suffering. We urge all parties in Syria to assist with the relief efforts of the international community by providing full humanitarian access so as to ensure the timely and safe delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The international community should also work jointly to take expeditious action to ease tensions so as to create conditions conducive to the implementation of humanitarian assistance and the promotion of a political settlement of the issue.

In working to mitigate the humanitarian situation, we should not overlook the need to combat terrorism. Terrorists and terrorist organizations inside Syria are launching repeated attacks, gravely hampering humanitarian efforts. The international community must strengthen its coordination, follow uniform standards and resolutely combat all Council-listed terrorist organizations.

A political settlement is the only viable way to resolve the Syrian issue, and the international community should stay the course in that respect. Any action taken by the Council on the issue of Syria should truly improve the situation there and be genuinely beneficial to the promotion of the political process, to advancing humanitarian relief efforts and to efforts to combat terrorism. China will continue to support the mediation efforts of Special Envoy De Mistura.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. O'Brien and Ms. Hoff for their briefings this morning.

At the outset, let me stress once again what has already been agreed on repeatedly by the international community: that there can be no military solution to the Syrian crisis. A comprehensive settlement is required in order to bring about a united, sovereign Syria that responds to the Syrian people's desire for a future of security and prosperity that is free of terrorism, and it must be based on Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2254 (2015), and the Geneva communiqué. This will require efforts by the Syrian Government and the opposition to agree on an interim phase.

Egypt, in cooperation with our Security Council partners Spain and New Zealand, is continuing to seek to alleviate the humanitarian situation in Syria, particularly in Aleppo, in view of what has befallen that city. We believe that the Security Council will not be able to reach a definitive solution so long as a political settlement hinges on agreement between the Syrian parties. We have therefore provided the Security

Council, through our draft resolution, with a clear path, which will be a pivotal step towards helping to reach this objective. We hope that the Security Council will be soon able to support this view.

There is a need for a cessation of hostilities in Aleppo for at least 10 days in order to create a humanitarian space, as well as for an immediate call for a cessation of hostilities in Syria in general, in order to reach a definitive ceasefire in accordance with resolution 2268 (2016), with implementation monitoring. This vision also includes combating terrorism; an end to cooperation by any party in Syria with terrorist groups, which now control large swathes of territory in the country; and the need to work to initiate serious negotiations between the Syrian parties on the interim period, in accordance with the Geneva communiqué and resolution 2254 (2015).

Let me reiterate our hope that the Security Council will be able to adopt this view as soon as possible. I would also call once again on all parties within and outside Syria to overcome their political differences in order to end this humanitarian tragedy, whose consequences are being borne by the Syrian people alone.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Senegal.

The Senegalese delegation, like those that spoke before it, expresses its profound thanks to Mr. Stephen O'Brien and Ms. Elizabeth Hoff for their briefings.

Unfortunately, the Security Council is once again responding to the heartfelt appeals by Mr. O'Brien and Ms. Hoff to our humanity with a public showing of its lack of unity, its divisiveness, its lack of political will and, in short, its powerlessness to take concrete action on any one dimension of the tragedy in Syria, including the political, humanitarian and security dimensions. As we saw last Thursday (see S/PV.7815), the Council cannot even agree on the non-proliferation dimension. At the same time, the downward spiral into the depths of suffering and horror in that country continues. At the same time, the risk of that large and beautiful country's fragmentation is increasing. Terrorists from everywhere continue to take root and exert their influence. Syria's rich cultural heritage is in the process of being destroyed and trafficked. In order to prevent all of that, the Senegalese delegation calls on the Council to leap to action and help the Syrian people undergoing a national crisis.

We welcome the courageous initiative undertaken by the penholders — Malaysia, Spain and New Zealand — in calling for the adoption of a new draft resolution to end the violence in Syria, in particular in Aleppo. We must support that initiative, because we owe it to the suffering population of Syria and the valiant humanitarian workers from all over whose calling it is to tirelessly offer relief to civilians in Syria. In that spirit, I call on the members of the Council, during our meeting in the closed consultations following this meeting, to find reason for a glimmer of hope. We must do that, because we are all in agreement that there can be no military solution to the conflict. Let us therefore work towards finding a political solution. And in doing so, we will send a message of hope to the talks in Lausanne and Geneva, and renew our support for the International Syria Support Group, in particular to the co-Chairs, so as to give a new breath of life to the cessation of hostilities regime.

I now resume my functions as President.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I simply want to state for the record that we are witnessing, within the Security Council, the normalization of a culture of unacceptable behaviour. When the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic took the floor, other Permanent Representatives purposefully stood up and left the Chamber. We believe that such conduct points to their lack of courage to listen to a statement made by a professional colleague. That is unacceptable.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in French*): I join my colleague, the representative of the Russian Federation, in what he has just stated in such a dignified matter with regard to behaviour by certain Council members towards me. Having said that, since the three musketeers, the advocates of a system aimed at sowing moral confusion, have left the Chamber and are thereby no longer in a position to undermine and poison our important discussion on my country, Syria, I can now deliver my statement in peace.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

At the outset, I welcome Ms. Hoff, who joins us from Damascus, the world's oldest capital. I bid

welcome to the United Nations personnel in my country. They are on-the-ground witnesses who can effectively inform the Security Council with far more accurate information than the United Nations bureaucrats in New York can muster.

Allow me first to share a piece of information with my colleagues with regard to a fresh massacre committed by war planes of the so-called international coalition led by the United States against Syrian civilians. More than 10 civilians lost their lives in a raid conducted by those United States aeroplanes against the village of Al-Salhiya in rural northern Al-Raqqa. Other war planes of the same coalition targeted a cotton mill in the same village, resulting in the martyrdom of three workers and an entire family, composed of six civilians, that had been displaced from another area. Those are today's developments, which have resulted from the actions of United States war planes.

Naturally, I will not respond to the statements made by certain colleagues. I would like, however, to respond to the statement delivered by the representative of the United States to the effect that she was allegedly told by an eye witness among the terrorists sponsored by the United States in eastern Aleppo that Syrian and Russian war planes conducted 180 air raids on Saturday alone. Being a seasoned and expert diplomat, she naively believed the eye witness, who is putatively a terrorist from Jabhat Al-Nusra, which her own Government has qualified as a terrorist group in the Council. What kind of hypocrisy is that? What sort of lies are we hearing in these unnecessary meetings on the humanitarian situation in my country?

Then she mendaciously Al-Nusra Front falsely claimed that leaflets were dropped by the Syrian air force, urging civilians in eastern Aleppo to leave or they would be killed. That is what was stated by the representative of the United States. Such talk simply amounts to lies upon lies and, frankly, they are shameful. The Syrian air force did drop leaflets in eastern Aleppo, calling on civilians to distance themselves from armed terrorist groups in the eatern part of the city and to leave eastern Aleppo. The Syrian Government opened six humanitarian corridors for civilians and two for the fighters who wish to leave eastern Aleppo. However, the terrorists, of course, did not leave and did not allow the civilians to leave because they use them as human shields.

At any rate, if some Governments are concerned about the terrorists in eastern Aleppo, why do they not issue them with passports or visas and take them in? If the representative of the United States believes that the arrival of 8,000 armed terrorists from eastern Aleppo in the United States will help the Syrian people, then take them, especially given the fact that most of them are not Syrian. In a special report from the Counter-Terrorism Committee, the Council stated that there are approximately 80,000 foreign terrorists in Syria, who came to my country from around 100 States Members of the United Nations. That was stated by the Council. That seems to have fallen on deaf ears, in the case of the Ambassadors of the United States, the United Kingdom and France.

Not once did Mr. O'Brien refer to terrorism in his briefing. Not once was the word terrorism used, as if there were no terrorism whatsoever in my country, Syria, and it is all a mere Tom and Jerry cartoon in the minds of some. I respect the comments made by my colleague, the Ambassador of Uruguay. He quite rightly wondered about which god and what values compel a terrorist to kill civilians.

It is a valid question. However, the reply can be found in the hundreds of letters that we have sent to the Council over a five-year period, stating who is doing what on Syrian territories. There are hundreds of letters in which we have explained the presence of terrorists on the ground. Many resolutions have been adopted, in particular resolution 2178 (2014) on foreign armed mercenaries. Yet some in the Council still do not know which Godand which religion, and who is the takfiri who brought us Saudi and Qatari Wahhabi's Fatwas to shed blood in my country, as if it is a piece of information not known to some, and as if what the takfiris are doing is occurring in Somalia and not in Syria.

To my dear friend the Ambassador of Uruguay, I say — the terrorists are the takfiris. The takfiri terrorists are influenced by the Saudi Wahhabi way of thinking. In other words, a takfiri is anyone who considers you infidel and deserve being killed because you do not share his extremist views. That is the meaning of takfiri. The actions of Da'esh and Al-Nusra are based on the same Wahabi doctrine that prevails in Saudi Arabia. They have exported that terrorism to us. They have brought terrorists to us from all over the world — Australians, Canadians, French, Belgians, Spaniards, Chinese, Russians. The entire garbage pail of the world's terrorism has been heaped on us. Yet some

are still wondering what is occurring in Syria? who is killing whom? Why does humanitarian assistance not reach eastern Aleppo? Who is hampering humanitarian assistance to eastern Aleppo? As if such questions need a key to be answered after five years of criminal acts being perpetrated against my country.

The kind of terrorism we suffer is the same that prevails everywhere — in Iraq, Libya, Egypt, Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, the Niger, Chad and Nigeria. It is the same terrorism; its roots are the same. Why do we all, without exception, support the fight being waged by the Iraqi Government and the popular mobilization forces against Da'esh terrorism in Mosul? We do so because it is a valid right. The Iraqi Government is fighting terrorism. We are combating the very same terrorism in Syria. Terrorism in Aleppo is the same kind of terrorism carried out in Mosul, so why then are we being condemned while the very same people who criticize us support those who are fighting the same terrorism in Mosul? Da'esh is there and the same Da'esh is here, in my country. Why does that double standard exist?

Let us not forget that United States air raid against the Syrian Arab Army sites in Deir ez-Zor, allowing that city to be besieged by ISIL. There are 300,000 people in Deir Ez-Zor receiving food and medical assistance, air-dropped by helicopters, simply because the United States air force struck the Syrian Arab army sites in Deir ez-Zor. Does the representative of the United States recall the theatrics at the meeting that immediately followed that attack, and the claims that a mistake had been made? Two days later, every civilian bridge on the Euphrates was also struck. Is this fighting Da'esh? Is it the goal of the United States air force to target Syrian infrastructure? There were 200 victims when Manbij was struck by the French air force, and the same number after it was struck by the United Kingdom air force. What is all this absurdity.

The statements made by the representatives of some States and the briefing given by the Under-Secretary-General for humanitarian affairs met our expectations for the thirty-third time with their same negative, erroneous approach of distorting facts and making light of the suffering of the Syrian people. It reveals the politicization of the humanitarian situation in order to demonize the Syrian Government with a view to creating a terrorist entity — a terrorist statelet — in my country, Syria. That is the plan — to create a terrorist statelet in Syria. It is a fact — a terrorist entity that obtains support from the Western sponsors of terrorism. It is further proof that those States and actors have no will or desire to end the suffering of our people and continue to deny the root causes of the crisis in Syria.

In that regard, I repeat once again that we reject the fact that the crisis in my country, Syria, is being addressed without serious consideration for its root causes. Those causes are the emergence and spread of armed terrorist groups, the recruitment of tens of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters supported by well-known States, and their deployment in neighbourhoods, villages, towns and cities where they use civilians as human shields. Let me repeat again that certain States that today use the suffering of the Syrian people as a cheap tool to implement their political agenda, by claiming to be concerned for their security and well-being, are the main reason for this suffering, either through their direct support to armed terrorist groups or their imposition of unilateral coercive measures, which affect Syrian citizens directly. Let me repeat again that no one in the world is more eager than us, the Government and the people of Syria, to preserve the lives of Syrian citizens, whether in Aleppo, Dara'a, Damascus, Raqqa or any other place where civilians suffer because of the practices of armed terrorist groups that use them as humans shields, besiege them in their towns and villages, prevent them from leaving those areas and obstruct their access to humanitarian assistance or sell them such assistance at prices they cannot afford.

Let me repeat yet again that, in the light of this bitter fact, any Government, including the Syrian Government, has the moral and legal obligation to save their citizens from becoming hostages to terrorists. Yesterday, 20 November, groups that certain parties and States like to call non-State armed opposition groups perpetrated a new, horrific and premeditated massacre when their terrorists stationed in the Bustan Al-Qasr neighbourhood of eastern Aleppo launched a number of missiles against the Al-Furqan and Saria Hassoun schools in the Al-Furqan community of western Aleppo, killing 10 children between the ages of 7 and 12 and wounding 59 others, including a female teacher whose leg had to be amputated. These are pictures of the school that was bombed in Aleppo by the so-called moderate armed groups — the genetically modified armed groups. Obviously, some people do not care about such photographs and will not speak about them.

Incidentally, as I mentioned, one of the schools that was attacked is named Saria Hassoun. Five years ago, I spoke to the Council (see S/PV.6627) and stated that armed terrorist groups had killed the son of the Mufti in Syria, the Public Mufti of the Syrian Arab Republic, whose name is Saria Hassoun. That school was named after the martyr Saria Hassoun, son of Syria's Mufti, who was killed by terrorists five years ago. Today, they are attacking the school named after him.

In addition to striking those two schools, the terrorists from Jabhat Al-Nusra, the Nur al-Din al-Zenki Movement, which is supported by Turkish intelligence services, and other terrorist groups classified as moderate armed groups by Washington, Paris and London, who pay their mercenaries and provide them with funding and weapons, part of which came from Ukraine, Bulgaria and Croatia, also opened fire on the law school and the Mogambo and Al-Midan neighbourhoods, killing two individuals and wounding 33 others. Furthermore, missiles launched by terrorist groups against Al-Ma'damia and Saif Al-Doula neighbourhoods in western Aleppo killed two people and wounded seven citizens.

Those attacks by terrorist armed groups coincided with another truce, the third of its kind since 9 September, which was declared by the Syrian Government and its allies in the city of Aleppo in order to save the lives of innocent citizens and end their suffering. I repeat that this is the third truce since 9 September, which goes completely counter to what the American Ambassador said to the effect that an eye witness told her that the Russian and Syrian air forces bombed eastern Aleppo 180 times on Saturday. Imagine such ridiculous talk coming from the representative of a super-Power and a permanent member of the Security Council. The truce declared by the Syrian Government and its allies provides for safe passage to be given to any armed persons seeking to leave the area, normalize their situation or take their personal weapons to another place of their choice; for the evacuation and medical care for the wounded, in order to restore normal life to the eastern part of Aleppo — and I am talking about the eastern side of Aleppo, not the east side of Manhattan, California, Glasgow or Marseille; the eastern part of Aleppo, a Syrian city — and for the resumption of the State institutions' tasks to to provide services and meet the needs of citizens who wish to remain in eastern Aleppo.

Regrettably, well-known States and parties have hampered all such initiatives by instructing the armed terrorist groups to reject any initiative, target civilians inside their schools and homes in western Aleppo, entrench themselves in civilian neighbourhoods in eastern Aleppo, use civilians as human shields and kill any civilian trying to reach the safe exit points, as was the case on 17 November when 17 civilians were executed for protesting the practices of terrorist groups in eastern Aleppo. That fact demonstrates that these armed terrorist groups are a tool for a heinous blackmail by certain States to achieve a tawdry political agenda at the expense of the suffering of the Syrian people and their blood.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic rejects the selective approach of certain States and United Nations bodies to the humanitarian crisis in Syria. It stresses that the main reason for the non-delivery of humanitarian assistance in many regions are the following. First, terrorist groups are besieging entire areas and rejecting the delivery of any assistance. Secondly, armed terrorist groups are targeting and stealing from humanitarian convoys. Thirdly, insecurity in the regions where armed terrorist groups are active, including highway robberies, targeting of civilian aircraft and aircraft carrying assistance, attacking humanitarian and medical workers and selling humanitarian assistance material. Fourthly, politicizing the humanitarian question in Syria and a double standard maintained by certain States and organizations that focus on the humanitarian situation in some areas exclusively for political aims, while fully ignoring other regions. Fifthly, a lack of cooperation and coordination with the Syrian Government, and the use of agreements with non-governmental organizations that are not accredited by Syria, or organizations working from Gaziantep in Turkey without coordination with the Syrian Government. That is something we will not tolerate. Sixthly, there is a lack of funding for humanitarian response plans as a result of the failure by some States to fulfil their pledges. The funding for the response plan for 2016 did not exceed 33 per cent. Lastly, there is the delay in the implementation of projects and programmes under the response plan.

In conclusion, the Syrian people have grown sick and tired of mendacious statements and hypocritical initiatives, as well as the misleading reports that have flooded the work of the Security Council and United

Nations bodies almost on a daily basis over the past five years, but have brought about no humanitarian benefit to the Syrian people. Indeed, their suffering has increased in an unprecedented manner because some within, and outside, the Council have been involved in fuelling and perpetuating the crisis. As for the assistance that has arrived — and Ms. Hoff did say that millions of Syrians benefitted from that assistance — that was done in coordination with the Syrian Government — 70 to 75 per cent of the assistance was provided by the Syrian Government itself — not the United Nations, despite the siege imposed on us by the States sponsoring terrorism and the economic sanctions that have been levelled against us for years.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.